An Inaugural Dissertation on the Ergot

By.

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of
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Passed March 13th 1823

There is not an article in the materia medica, the efficacy of which has not at one time or another been doubted or wholly rejected by physicians, so fluctuating are the opinions of medical men.– Whether the Ergot is doomed to the same fate, time alone can determine, but if evidence of the utility of an article ever existed, it has been demonstrated by the effects of this, for in no instance have we such a striking example of a specific action, as in the case of the medicine now under consideration, when exhibited in one of the most important operations of the human economy.

"Before physicians were acquainted with the powers of this article on the uterine system, they had not the power of relieving suffering humanity with the same facility they

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now have; the parturient woman was liable to a thousand dangers, from which she is now exempt.

When an atony of the uterus existed, their only recourse was to instruments and other harsh means ~~that~~ that jeopardised the lives of both mother and child; but since the introduction of this article into the practice of midwifery, a tedious labour (where it depends upon a want of action in the uterus,) excites no more alarm than a perfectly natural one, for by a dose of this, it is generally converted into such, and in a short time the sufferings of the patient cease, and the anxiety of her friends and relatives are relieved from a state of suspense in which they would inevitably have been held; or perhaps, had to mourn the loss of both mother and child had not this powerful article been brought into requisition.

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active medicines, should not be put into the hands of the vulgar or an ignorant practitioner; the bad consequences resulting from its being made public or indiscriminately used in lingering labours are so obvious, that I shall deem it unnecessary to mention them.

Candour compells me to acknowledge that I have very little original to offer upon the subject, either as regards its natural history, - medicinal, or poisonous properties, - I shall therefore content myself with collecting the observations of some of the best writers on the subject, and making a few remarks upon others. Doctor Mitchell says that "botanists yet debate whether the Ergot is a diseased grain, or fungus, or a vegetable which occupies the receptacle of a grain which had perished". After exhibiting a bundle of Ergotted rye to his class, he tells them a ludicrous tale of an imaginary animal that

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exists in the article, and deposits his fæces in it, and concludes by saying that "the medicine made of it, is a farrago of corrosive Ergot, of entire Ergot, dung, insects and all."

It may be thought presumptuous to oppose such authority as just quoted, but if the Ergot contained an insect, as described so minutely by Doctor Mitchell, it ought to be visible to every beholder. I have examined the article pretty accurately, and have never been able to detect its presence in it, nor have I ever heard or seen his assertions corroborated by others. I shall therefore dismiss his theory of its composition, and adopt the ideas of authors who are less speculative, and are content to consider it entirely a vegetable substance, produced by a vitiated vegetation in the rye.

Other kinds of grain than the rye are said to be liable to the same disease, and

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[illegible] possess the same properties, but I have no [illegible] to discover any other kinds of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] seemed to notice they [illegible] particular, because the [illegible] is inherent in the eye (upon which its [illegible] and [illegible] depend); [illegible] in the most heat the eye, but in different [illegible] and that the [illegible] upon the eye, [illegible] to go on, which [illegible] a greater [illegible] of this [illegible] [illegible].

It [illegible] that [illegible] the same properties, but [illegible] we [illegible] upon [illegible] which [illegible] upon [illegible] time. [illegible] have [illegible]

[illegible] these cattle with rye bran, during the latter stated a pregnancy, that they would endure the season so doing, a pregnant [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] be known at the proper season for drawing and rearing.

The bran also produced in a very dangerous manner when rye which had been fed with it, producing a crude condition upon the skin, with great inactivity of the whole body, and, without the death of the animal is long continued. Now if these cows were cows of [illegible] with the same kind of disease a very different course it would have to endure in order [illegible] the same peculiar disagreeable condition in the spermatic rye, for in the case of the rye there is only a superabundant secretion; — in the case of other grains there would have to be a very limited secretion in their healthy state they do not contain that principle, which is current given

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] some have supposed they have traced it to a species of fermentation; and the Abbe Fontana [illegible] it may be produced by contact in the experiments of the abbe I have repeated with quantity of others for the same purpose but [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

I am inclined to the opinion of Dr Coste [illegible] with a difference on these articles by both, either, of Dr [illegible] which is not a set of experiments [illegible] it may be explained by contagion the drug. I have [illegible]

[illegible] be placed on a board [illegible] at the time it is jostling with the other, the lower will be filled with the substance, as well as several of the [illegible] mineral [illegible], [illegible] several experiments of this extraordinary [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]."

"The observations I have made respecting the determination of the stone in the kidneys, that the cause most important is a low drain soil, on the margin of a [illegible], and in most stony districts.

The appearance of the stone is not known at what [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] at [illegible], being of various sizes and dimensions; some being of the shape and size of a [illegible] [illegible] of eggs, some being much less, thin and [illegible], but the greatest number are much larger, of an irregular shape, and being some resembling the figures of a rock. It has been say a little [illegible], and [illegible]

[illegible] and a remarkable similar in taste to
a [illegible].

The medical properties of [illegible]
[illegible]

[illegible] years of age that [illegible]
[illegible]

[illegible] thoroughly [illegible] the intestines; these
[illegible] by [illegible] are [illegible]
[illegible]

But the most distressing of the complaints
[illegible] by [illegible] in a [illegible] which
[illegible] these articles, or by [illegible],
[illegible] [illegible]. The [illegible]
[illegible] of [illegible], or animals, [illegible]
[illegible] I believe, I should have [illegible] the [illegible]

effects by administering the medicine to them, not, after using the cattle for about 15 days, these stools became so extremely foetid, that I was unable to approach them with them, I invent the [illegible] to the [illegible] I have, that I kept them separately, to see that it had a very decided effect upon them. The [illegible] to the [illegible], and on the fourteenth day, attacked with convulsions — they both became so extremely [illegible] (though they have plenty of good [illegible] water) that it would not have been possible for them to have survived many days longer; these stools were very offensive, of a [illegible] colour, and sometimes mixed with blood, and as I have stated, were extremely offensive.

[illegible] the [illegible] on the prevalency of [illegible] among the late [illegible] was ascribed to be caused by the [illegible]

[illegible] of bacon which contained these substances, and it is evident that the effects were imputed to the right cause, for when a supply of these animals from Ohio, they entirely disappeared, and did not return [illegible] the stock of swine [illegible]; but when they were exhausted, and they again resorted to the place of the country, the dysentery also appeared again, and continued to rage to an alarming extent so long as [illegible] of the country fare was used by them.

Medicinal properties.

The oldest [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] to do so [illegible] on this account; I am not [illegible] to [illegible] the properties [illegible] the report of the physician at the head of the committee may [illegible] to be believed it is [illegible]

inadequate to the cure of the disease, having tried it upon himself without any accounts, whatever.

He also read in the journal de physique August 1774 that it was cured by the same Dr. Franklin of Chaumont, in Berry, in the case of a thirteen year old of the fever, given in wine or bath, in the case of taking laborary, with the happiest effect; the chills being generally relieved in fifteen minutes after the exhibition, and never succeeding by any bad consequences.

The medal of first interest in the capital into the fever, is due to this country, as it appears physicians to be upon which with medal or rather the effigy of an elect which is now in the hands of employ.

The experiment fever, in England, has, I believe, been the cause of the loss, undertaken by the physicians of that country, was [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] of the [illegible] [illegible]

a manner.

Doctor Stearns of Saratoga county, State of New York, was the first who gave a correct account of its marvelous properties, and wonderful powers in accelerating lingering labour, and the authenticity of his account has since been confirmed by a large number of physicians, though there are a few who think that the bad effects arising from its use more than overbalance all the advantages said to be accrued from its administration, and there are others who hesitate to say, that it has any action whatever on the uterine system.

Until a person is completely devoid of prejudice, when he wants to ascertain a fact by experiment, it is impossible to arrive at any correct conclusion, for an experiment may always be performed in such a manner as to suit the views of the experimentalist; and I have no doubt in a great proportion,

in the three accouchements were conducted by Pierre Chat[illegible] in [illegible] out of twelve cases of births [illegible] attended by him where he gave the ergot in doses [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in any given [illegible] which followed the administration, but [illegible] of these symptoms which followed was imputed to the influence. Even in his first case he wants to insinuate that it had an action on the uterus;— the labor had lasted 24 hours since the waters [illegible], but he says "he dares [illegible] [illegible] be [illegible] to attribute the death of the child to the ergot."

This inference drawn by Chatard must convince every person that [illegible] not [illegible] [illegible] an impartial [illegible], [illegible] the very circumstances [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] of the [illegible] with a [illegible] [illegible], where I think we [illegible] be satisfied that I have not unjustly

charged Mr [illegible] with being prejudiced against the article. — His paper may be found in the New York medical repository for 1819.

There are a few others who have attempted to depreciate the value of the cowpox among whom is Dr Hoſack, of New York. But the authority of Doctors James, Chapman, and Dewees, and a number of other respectable practitioners, is, I think, sufficient to assure it could not be doubted, and therefore the [illegible] [illegible] circumstances [illegible] [illegible] mention

[illegible] thus stated, that it is acknowledged that the cowpox cannot protect the [illegible] without rendering it necessary to destroy the third by the operation of contagion, we may next [illegible] the right with the most [illegible] advantage in order to induce vaccination. Taking the value of the article [illegible] [illegible] cannot be too highly appreciated; we not only [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

under the entreaties of the question, and
[illegible] the [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible], but we frequently see the pleasure to reflect
that we have been instrumental in saving the
life of the sufferer and restoring it to the bosom
of an anxious mother.

In hemorrhage or where it depends upon
an atony of the uterine fibres — the soft parts
being relaxed and lubricated with mucus, we
may expect great advantage from it in a
dose of 10 or 20 grains in powder or decoc-
tion; it generally rest in the last two of the
uterus in 15 or 20 minutes, and enables it to
expel its contents in a [illegible] time.

In consequence of the effects of this medicine
being so transient, it is necessary to repeat it
about every 10 minutes. I have had no expe-
rience with the other medicines, but my friend
Dr Langston, and my brother Dr Thomson,
have each of them frequently used it and are

much pleased with its effects.

In retained placenta, where the action of the uterus has been exhausted by the previous exertions in expelling the child, the ergot is also very serviceable. From the confidence with which Dr James speaks of it in this case I am disposed to believe it a very valuable remedy

The ergot has also been recommended as a remedy in amenorrhoea, but if we adopt the idea that it acts on the uterus only while in a state of distension, we cannot expect much from it in this disease, though my preceptor says he thinks he has seen it used with advantage in the New York State Prison

In dysmenorrhoea the ergot is said to be useful, but this disease like the preceding one, has, I think remedies that are better adapted to its treatment, as the volatile tincture of guaiacum, tincture of cantharides &c.

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upon a debility and relaxation of the uterine fibres, may be frequently cured by the use of our medicine. It acts by exciting a contraction of the uterus, and thereby constringing the mouths of the bleeding vessels, which prevents the further flow of blood.